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Seminar Series on Ideas, Identities, and Decisional Processes that Affect Security

Elizabeth Kassab

"What is Enlightenment? Arab and Postcolonial Perspectives"

Wednesday, November 3, 2010

Noon

Mershon Center for International Security Studies

1501 Neil Ave., Columbus, OH 43201

To see a streaming video of this event, [click here](#)

Lecture Abstract

A close reading of contemporary Arab thought reveals the notable amount of critical effort deployed by Arab intellectuals since the mid 20th century in dealing with questions of culture and politics. To what extent has this effort produced a process of enlightenment, and in what sense? What have the main themes, promises and challenges of this process been? And how do these compare with such processes elsewhere in the postcolonial world?

This talk addresses these questions by focusing on the recent Arab intellectual history from within a large comparative postcolonial approach. It articulates reflections on the intellectual, cultural and political meaning of enlightenment in Arab and postcolonial contexts.

Biography

Elizabeth Kassab studied at the American University of Beirut business administration and philosophy, and continued her graduate studies in philosophy at Fribourg University in Switzerland. Her dissertation on the theory of meaning in the interpretative social sciences was published by the Editions Universitaires de Fribourg under the title *The Theory of Social Action in the Schutz-Parsons Debate*. She then spent 3 years as a post-doctorate fellow at the University of Bielefeld in



Elizabeth Kassab
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Germany.

She returned to Beirut in 1991 and taught for many years at the philosophy department in AUB, and later at Balamand University. In 1999 she was awarded a Fulbright fellowship to work on her research project at the New School University in New York. After that she was Visiting Scholar at Columbia University for several years and a Visiting Associate Professor at the Yale Center for International and Area Studies in 2006-07. She was also an Arcapita Visiting Professor at the Middle East Institute of Columbia in the spring of 2008. Most recently she was a research fellow at the German Orient Institute in Beirut, and she is currently a fellow researcher at Erfurt University in Germany.

Kassab's overall interest has been in the philosophy of culture, both Western and non-Western, with a particular focus on postcolonial debates on cultural malaise, authenticity and critique. Her latest book, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (Columbia University Press, 2009), is an examination of critical thinking in Arab and postcolonial (mainly African and Latin American) debates on culture in the second half of the 20th century. Her current research centers on the notion of enlightenment in these debates, especially among post-Ottoman Arab, Greek and Turkish intellectuals.

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